



# Department of Planning and Zoning



## The Subdivision and Land Development Review Process

### INTRODUCTION

Howard County's Subdivision and Land Development Regulations are intended to promote the health, safety and general welfare of County residents. The Department of Planning and Zoning is responsible for processing and approving all subdivision and land development plans within the County with assistance from the Subdivision Review Committee (SRC).

**WHAT ARE THE BASIC STAGES TO SUBDIVIDE OR DEVELOP LAND?** There are two processes which a developer may choose from for major subdivisions:

### PROCESSING STAGES:

#### Standard Plan Submission

Sketch Plan → Preliminary Plan → Final Plan → Site Development Plan

#### Alternate Plan Submission

Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan → Final Plan → Site Development Plan

- A **Sketch Plan** informs the County of a developer's intent, the proposed timing for development and the design concept. It displays information such as density, road network, lot layout and an environmental analysis of the property. The sketch plan process also familiarizes the developer with County and State plans and regulations, which may affect the subdivision, such as the General Plan, Adequate Public Facilities testing, the Capital Improvement Program, and Forest Conservation requirements.
- A **Preliminary Plan** presents preliminary engineering to implement the approved sketch plan. The preliminary plan addresses the lot and road arrangement, traffic and noise conditions, forest conservation, environmental impact, sewage disposal, water supply, drainage, stormwater management and proposed grading.
- A **Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan** is an alternate plan process which includes all the information normally required with both the sketch and preliminary plan submissions on one plan. Although this combined submission is optional for major subdivisions using public water and sewer, it is required for major subdivisions using wells and septic systems.

- A **Final Subdivision Plan** is the culmination of the subdivision process. The final plan submission includes a final plat, that will become the official record of the subdivision of land into lots, parcels and road right-of-ways. The submission also includes construction drawings for roads, water and sewer, stormwater management and any other infrastructure items. For minor subdivisions, which create four or fewer lots for residential or agricultural purposes, a final subdivision plat is the only stage required for subdivision processing.
- A **Site Development Plan (SDP)** is a detailed engineered drawing required for commercial, institutional, industrial and most residential development. Generally, SDP's include existing and proposed buildings, structures, paved areas, topography, drainage and stormwater management, sediment and erosion control measures, utilities, easements, 100 year floodplain, wetlands, forest stand delineation, forest conservation areas and landscaping.

## **HOW DO I APPLY?**

The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) has subdivision and SDP applications and checklists available at the Public Service Desk to assist applicants with the plan preparation and submittal requirements. Applications and checklists are also available on DPZ's web site at [www.howardcountymd.gov](http://www.howardcountymd.gov).

A Maryland registered engineer, architect and/or land surveyor must prepare the necessary plans and supplemental documents.

## **WHAT FEES ARE REQUIRED?**

Filing fees for subdivision and site development plans are based on a Schedule of Fees adopted each year by Resolution of the County Council. The Schedule of Fees is available at the DPZ public service desk. The fee schedule is also available on DPZ's web site at [www.howardcountymd.gov](http://www.howardcountymd.gov).

## **WHAT IS THE REVIEW PROCESS FOR SUBDIVISION AND SITE DEVELOPMENT PLANS?**

### **Step 1. Pre-Submission Community Meeting.**

A developer or property owner must schedule and hold a meeting with community residents for all new residential projects prior to submitting subdivision plans to the County. This is an opportunity for community residents to learn about, ask questions and express any concerns regarding the proposed residential development.

### **Step 2. Submittal of Plans to the County.**

Subdivision and site development plans are submitted, by appointment, at the DPZ Public Service desk located on the first floor of the George Howard Building. The accepted plan will be assigned a file number and distributed to the Subdivision Review Committee (SRC), an advisory group of County and State departments, for review, comments and recommendations.

The SRC is composed of the following County and State departments:

- Planning and Zoning
- Inspections, Licenses and Permits

- Health
- Recreation and Parks
- Public Works
- Fire and Rescue Services
- State Highway Administration
- Soil Conservation District
- Public School System

### **Step 3. Review of the Plans**

The SRC agencies review the subdivision or site development plan to verify compliance with County and State regulations. The Department of Planning and Zoning coordinates the SRC comments.

### **Step 4. Decision on Technical Completeness of Plans**

Within 60 days from submission of the plan, the DPZ provides a written decision to the applicant indicating that the plan is: (1) technically complete, (2) technically complete with modifications, or (3) in need of revisions. A plan is technically complete if it complies with all applicable County and State regulations for design of the development.

If revised plans are necessary in order to approve the plan, the applicant must revise the plans and resubmit them, by appointment, to the DPZ within 45 days of receiving the decision and comments.

### **Step 5. Adequate Public Facilities Testing**

The Adequate Public Facilities (APF) regulations require that all residential subdivisions pass adequate public facilities tests for elementary and middle school capacity, for adequacy of vicinal road intersections, and for availability of housing unit allocations. The testing for vicinal road intersection adequacy occurs prior to the issuance of tentative approval of a Sketch or a Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan by the DPZ. Once the road test has been satisfactorily passed and the Sketch or Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan has been granted signature approval by the Planning Director, the tests for housing unit allocations and school capacity are given. The school test is not taken until tentative housing unit allocations have been granted. If housing unit allocations are not available or school capacity does not exist, the plan will be placed on hold pending a change in that status.

Site Development Plans for residential units not requiring a subdivision are tested for road intersection adequacy during the review of the plan and are tested for allocation availability and school adequacy once the plan is determined to be technically complete.

Nonresidential subdivisions and site development plans take the road test, but not allocations or school tests.

### **Step 6. Planning Board Approval**

Some zoning districts require Planning Board approval of sketch plans or site development plans. For projects in these districts, the DPZ will advise the applicant of the Planning Board hearing or meeting date when it notifies the applicant that the plan is technically complete.

### **Step 7. Submittal of Plan Originals for Signature Approval**

When a plan is technically complete and required APF and Planning Board approvals are received, the DPZ will authorize the applicant, in writing, to submit original plans for signature. The applicant must submit the original mylar plans for signature approval, pay the required processing fees, and execute any required developer's agreements within the following processing deadlines.

- 45 days for Sketch, Preliminary and Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plans
- 60 days for Final Plan Road Construction Drawings
- 120 days for execution of the developer's agreement associated with the subdivision
- 180 days for Final Subdivision Plat
- 180 days for Site Development Plans and their associated developer's agreements

### **WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES FOR SUBDIVISION PLAN SUBMISSIONS?**

The County Code establishes deadlines (also known as milestones) for submission of subdivision plans for the next stage in the subdivision process. These milestones are measured from the date the developer receives written authorization from the DPZ to proceed to the next plan stage (i.e. sketch to preliminary, preliminary to final). The deadlines are:

- 4 months for residential projects with 50 or fewer housing units
- 6 months for residential projects with 51 to 100 housing units
- 9 months for residential projects with 101 or more housing units
- 9 months for nonresidential projects

This schedule can only be modified if the project is delayed by government action or approved as a phased project.

### **WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE FINAL SUBDIVISION PLAT AND SDP RECEIVE SIGNATURE APPROVAL?**

- The DPZ records final subdivision plats in the Land Records of Howard County. Once the final plat is recorded, the owner is entitled to transfer ownership of the recorded lots or parcels.
- Within 1 year of signature approval of the SDP original, the applicant must apply to the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits for building permits to initiate construction on the site. For apartment and nonresidential developments with multiple buildings, within two years of signature approval, the developer must apply for building permits for all construction authorized by the approved SDP. For single family detached developments, all permits must be applied for within 5 years of signature approval.

### **AN IMPORTANT NOTE . . .**

This brochure is meant to provide a basic understanding of the subdivision and land development process in Howard County. It is not intended as a substitute for the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations.

For more information contact:  
The Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning

(410) 313-2350, TTY 410-313-2323 or [www.howardcountymd.gov](http://www.howardcountymd.gov) or visit Planning & Zoning's Customer Service Center on the first floor of the George Howard Building, 3430 Courthouse Drive, Ellicott City, Maryland, 212043.

Office Hours are:  
Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Written inquiries may also be sent to our office at the above address.

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